EVESHAM STATION

poems by
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE TRAVELER

Evesham Station 9/9/74 **1**
Metamorphosis: Fish **3**
The Mad Man of Öland **4**
On Listening to Josquin Des Prez **5**
At the Beach, Venice, California **6**
Veterans **7**
Mourning **8**
In the Summerhouse **9**
At Carnegie Hall **10**
To a Friend Who Has Not Written **11**
The Bicyclist **12**
Vermont Farmhouse: 3 A.M. **13**
Sanctuary **14**
Aunt Tina Looks Up **15**
For "Whitey" **16**
Young Men Scattering Crows **17**
A Calm Space **18**
A Day in Carmarthen, 1919 **19**
For Winter **20**
On Raggedstone Hill **21**
In Stratford Church **22**
Sunday Evening in the Hills **23**
The Granary Wall **26**
Teaching in a City Far From You **27**
I'm Leaving **28**
The Traveler **29**

AT THE FRINGE (Translations)

Translations of George Trakl (with L.D. Davidson)

A Winter Evening **30**
Dirge **31**
At the Fringe **32**
Decline **33**
Sleep **34**
Grodek **35**

Translations of Thomas Bernhard (with L.D. Davidson)

This Year is Like the Year a Thousand Years Ago **36**
To Say A Word **37**

Translations of Nina Cassian

That Animal **38**
The Young Bat **39**

HOME

The Great Strangled Fruitillary **40**
Home **44**
Hypochondria **45**
The Defrocking of Pastor Van Dieman **46**
Night-Gardening **47**
August **48**

Notes **49**

EVESHAM STATION 9/9/74

I am standing on the platform.
I haven't traveled on a train
since I was a child.
I've forgotten what you do
with the luggage.
I am holding a brown leather brief case
with my name embossed in gold letters on it.
My sister gave it to me this morning.
She cried when I went.
She is sixteen.

I check my watch with the station clock.
"Is it right'?" I ask a man
in a brown suit who looks used to this kind of thing.
"Of course! It has to be!" he says.

I comb my hair--it is perfect, it is sleek--
I am new and sleek.
"Where are you off to?" a lady asks.
"Ruislip in Surrey," I say.
"That's a long way," she says.

Five minutes.
People are all around me.
They are used to this.
I check my ticket.
It is in my top pocket--
the top pocket of my jacket
which fits me perfectly.

'The train is coming.
It is loud, so loud.
I have tears in my eyes.
No one is seeing me off--
we thought it best not.

1 wait for some of the others to get in.
You put the luggage on the rack above the seat.
A paper.
I ought to have bought a paper.

I am sitting in the train.
I can see my face in the window.
I am on my way to Ruislip,
nothing can stop me now,
and I am perfect,

(continued)

no one can fault me.
I am going down to Ruislip
and I am perfect.

METAMORPHOSIS: FISH

It requires faith:
to travel a murky world
where stop signs are sea anemones,
subway stations clams.

I risk nothing
in shedding human sound,
my past's voices;
and gradually I learn
the movements of a swimmer
who never touched the ground.

I trust the sea's intention,
and inhabit a lucid dream,
opening and shutting my gills like angel's wings,
losing myself and finding myself
with each inhalation.

I'm heavy as a feather
of mercury:
I flash and
am gone.

THE MAD MAN OF ÖLAND

The Mad Man of Öland is the name of a small yellow flower found on the east coast of Sweden

Each day at dusk,
the mad old man
packs his pipe with sweet tobacco,
mutters at the gulls, 'God is good,'
'God is good," and shuffles down the quay
past the piles of dead mackerel
to the darkened tooth of the breakwater
which he calls The Gate to the Sea
when he says the patron saint of mad
old men stand. "When the gate turns gold
they ring the bells and it's time for me
to pick the flowers: each note
a petal in my head."

ON LISTENING TO JOSQUIN DES PREZ

Come, it is time to shut out
the final starlight
over the pig pens.
Whistle home the curs gaily
for you will eat them tomorrow;
beware the girl with breasts like pomegranates
for she will give you the clap;
and do not trust the priest-
he has raised an eyebrow once too often.

I am sighing all for love,
but ill had it,
it would disappoint.
So I will lie, feet crossed upon the straw,
and watch the mice
scatter in the roof beams.

AT THE BEACH, VENICE, CALIFORNIA

for Gerard O'Neill

I'm hushed up
in my wheelchair on the boardwalk,
the purple sea inviting me
to its unfoldings;
I want to leap up--
miracles in my legs--
and skitter like a mad sandpiper
into the waves.

It's not suicide 1 want,
no kind of losing,
but contact with the massive man inside me,
a woman's singing,
a unifying.

The sea says "Rise! Rise!"
I stick out my tongue.

As a child
I sat up in bed
in the middle of the night
and dangled my legs over the side.
I stared at those twigs
which didn't seem mine--
white and goose-pimpled
in the moonlight.
I willed them to be healed,
to grow long, strong
and manly. If had
faith enough, they said,
it would happen.

The sea accuses.
It calls me Coward
and Unbeliever.
It says "Movement
of muscle, movement
of muscle."

I wheel the chair
past the palm trees
back to the squabbling town.

I rock in my machine
dreaming into a blaring bar.
I stretch myself up on my arms
tall as I can
to order a drink.

"I can't hear you," says the bartender.
"Speak up! Speak up!"

VETERANS

We forgot our dreams,
the tone of letters,
the dimension of things.

Love was the dust on laurels,
touch, the fog of wasted winter.

Now courage seems mythical;
we spell Comfort over and over
as if it were a difficult word.

MOURNING

Now the live one
is a memory,
I favor things inanimate:

Walls comfort
as if to say
"We will hide you here--
picked tulip in its vase
head turned
to the evening garden.".

IN THE SUMMERHOUSE

Caught in the emptied cup,
the fly winds down
drowsy on pear juice,
settles at the bottom.
He begins brushing
he stained glass of his wings
with his broomed legs;
the secret of his heart
bumps against his belly's side.

It's not hypocrisy to him--
germ-spreader that he is--
that he maintains,
as death waits,
his dapper self, his panache
that bespeaks the traveler
in air.

AT CARNEGIE HALL

It was all thoroughly excellent,
they say, coming out of the concert,
though Clarke read the Post
and Anne wished she were watching
Dynasty. Two students leaving
the balcony agree the chorus was under-prepared.
To one side in the back row (whence the management
relegates those in wheelchairs)
Ilse is dabbing her eyes
with a violet-scented handkerchief.
She is remembering Vienna '36,
how in the chorus with the Philharmonic
under Furtwängler she sang this
same Choral Fantasy--that supreme
moment (she has just heard) when
everyone peaks at the final crescendo.
She has not noticed that the auditorium
has emptied or that her nurse is late.
She has forgotten her aches and
cataracts. She is present in her past.
She is totally comforted.

TO A FRIEND WHO HAS NOT WRITTEN

It's obvious:
The mailman played a trick
And hung your letter from a tree.
I suspect you also
Of cutting your tongue
Licking the flap
Patting the mailbox
As though it were my head.

You must have some news.
I do. The asters bloomed. There's still no rain.
Oh and I go often to
A place I found
Where leaves are letters falling
All of which I've written.

How I exhaust myself
Catching them!

THE BICYCLIST

in memory of Jackson Burgess

Moustache bristling,
tweed cap slightly askew,
bicycle-clips firmly in place,
he pedaled furiously the wrong way
down a one-way street.

Horns snarled.
A cab driver poked his head
out his window and said
'Buddy, you could lose
your life that way.'

But it wasn't how they thought.
His cycle grew wings,
and like a mechanical Pegasus
he soared above the street
to its end
which was the bay
and to its end
which was the sky
and he went into it muttering to himself
'This altitude is very unsettling.
I wonder if I have my notes for class.'

Suddenly the bicycle was gone
and he was naked.
'I'm white enough to be a cloud,' he said ,
and then it began--
first toes, then feet, then legs--
he was turning cloud.
'At last,' he said, '"I'll be
pure intellect...'
With these words his head too
turned cloud, he was complete,
and floated easily
back over the city
over the somber grey
of the English building.

Above the nearby trees and slopes
he turned to rain
and fell on the quiet grass
on the stiff and shining leaves
in gentle drops
the sound of his laughter.

VERMONT FARMHOUSE: 3 A.M.

Silence rooted to the spot
unachieved as darkness.
Ghosts forbear to whisper
fearful to expose some wound
frightful as the past
mocking our trivial tries
at starting over;
in the attic
a man's awake, gaping
at the blackness
fearing his death will be
like this: no one to comfort him
in the dawn kitchen,
no dog grumbling in its dream,
no one to call for;
beyond glum clouds
the moon, a sad luminosity,
shakes its head above the seething hills
wishing it could intervene
to save us.

SANCTUARY

We went out to lead the world,
sexless, poor and automatic,
sacrificing needs for what they told us
was the common good.
It took years to undo this curse--
the shiny cars and the white houses,
the bait of longing.
We fought back with drugs and movements,
ruining ourselves in secret valleys,
homesick for the childhoods
that we never had.
We recovered slowly--a firm rebellion--
bringing gifts to friends
in the small countries of friendship.
We live simply now in modest homes,
ride bicycles: too happy doing what we like
to wonder if we're happy,
marvelling how we came this far,
how we reached the water's edge
and found the perfect view.

AUNT TINA LOOKS UP

for '0'

Some of my niece's friends were
here this morning and I set them right.
I told them, the Sixties were pale
by comparison with the Twenties.
I was a flapper, I should know.
I could dance The Charleston better
than anyone, better than anyone.
And drink! Why, my husband's friends
passed me out just with the fumes
from the gin they were making in the
bathtub in the cellar! They came up to
look for me and there I was--passed out
cold on the deck. Later on we had a
party and drank the whole lot...
I'm sitting on the deck of my
niece's house in Arlington, Vermont.
I'm looking out at a green field and
a white fence. One of my niece's friends
called me handsome. He said I simply
glowed with serenity. All I know is,
all our troubles come from not being able
to sit alone in a room and
be at peace... I should get back to my
book. I'm reading America by Stephen
Vincent Benet. It makes me proud.
Lights are going on in the house across
the field... My niece is calling me in
to dinner. Tomorrow I go back to
Houston. "Coming, dear," I say, "as soon
as I've finished this chapter."

FOR “WHITEY”

in memoriam

A carriage horse collapses on Seventh
Avenue and as she falls, slow in slow
motion as if she will never reach
the ground, she begins to
mistake things: the lamp posts
for oak trees, in their tight buds
all the white lust she used to feel;
the cut of the shaft into her flank
for the firm tap of her first owner's hand;
the sudden dark of pain that punches her chest
for a belch of joy after a good feed
in her stall.

The police have arrived already,
the area cordoned off.
'The poor thing,' says a passer-by,
'Look at her scars.'
A cop says, 'She was born
in the wrong century,"

Slightly drunk, the driver
says he'll quit and drive a taxicab.
Without paying, the passengers
have fled to the subway.

YOUNG MEN SCATTERING CROWS

1.
In the marshland sallow with spring
crows' shadows wait
for the disturbance of young men
to scatter them like memories in air.

“Education you won't get from looking at trees,"
said our schoolmaster in the brown room.
"You young men are like a green wave
lapping at the town's shore."

2.
I arrive home,
signal the young men,
my former friends who sculpt the hedges
by the river.

In the pub they mimick me--
"In London I never drink beer"--their words
riding the night's warm breath.

3.
Under this sky that know its smallness
I close like a flower
in a garden of faces.

My mother waves.
Neighbors take cover in curtains.
Perhaps I'll find a feather
blue-black in the grass.

4.
I've forgotten the sky,
but the young men I remember-
always leafing ahead of me,
weaving through cattle,
scattering crows.

The town has a lover's reach--
its touch on the hand
I clench behind my back.

A CALM SPACE

The changes you have made
are quite remarkable. Look
how you've built a studio out of
a cellar--a calm space
out of the drunken chaos
of memory--and made
a home where people come and
go with ease; how you do
people good by the very
opening of your door
and profess to know less
as time goes on, your humility
a plain yard where others come
with seedlings and you
plant them, tend them
make them grow; and most of all
how you've brought order into
your life, and neat solutions,
and judgements sane; so that
I feel quite inadequate
-unmanageable as a used car
bought from the dump
which hurtles down the bumpy
street, complaining and complaining.

You tell me not to be foolish,
it's just that we have
different personalities for
God's sake, that I thrive
on sensation and the city's drama
whence come my poems
and the people in them.
But I've done some of my best
work in this very house, I say.
You were on vacation, you say...
But still I think I should
move north and do as you
have done, and fill my loneliness-
its clean, sad lens-
with quiet streets, gentle people,
famous skies.

(for Robin Yule)

A DAY IN CAMARTHEN, 1919

A song thrush,
silent in the early light,
unravels a worm,
like a thread of wool;
the postman cycling past,
throws his cap in the air,
remembering the Armistice.

In the shadowless reeds
mallards
clatter up from the lake,
reappearing
a black strand clearing the sky of clouds.

A long cry over the valley-
a falcon wheels and stalls and
watches for the ghosts of soldiers
rustling the oak trees,
then plunges
sharp
as a bayonet.

A swan floats on glass,
exact as the porcelain
in the hilltop house,
whose shutters blink
at the horse-drawn woods
and night
folding its arms.

FOR WINTER

I press my nails into the bark
A black leaf falls
A moment of sparse horizon

Mother folds linen
There... there...
And I am comforted

ON RAGGEDSTONE HILL

Hands clasp, lips touch,
and so we learn what passion is:
the losing in the thirst for dark;
the long, clear note
between the nightjar's callings;
the lure of oneness and the tremor
of ancient gongs, their echoes falling.

The barriers to love are falling away,
everything falls away
as in great illness or dying,
with only the memory of landscapes
in the ripening sun and grey gulls crying,
and moods induced by what we can't recall
surface in waves like the scent of sea breezes
over the old stone walls
and through white lilacs sighing.

IN STRATFORD CHURCH

Before the chancel
a gate
and a woman taking money.
Fifty pence and she
lets you through:
there it is:
a plain grey slab
with the words

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

POET

Everyone is talking noisily
and pointing: there it is.

SUNDAY EVENING IN THE HILLS

1. Over Ledbury's garden fences
by the waxy-scented honeysuckle
the wives are gossiping--
'We've never heard the like,' they say,
'and naked too and in a wood.
They ought to be--'
'They ought to be--'
'They never should--'
They shake their heads and frown
as if they were the purest virgins
and never longed for
night to show her secrets,
never longed for the forbidden giggling
and lingering
kisses on the mouth.

2. The swifts are circling
the tower of Eastnor church.
The organ booms;
in stiff collars
strained tenors
aim at high C's,
and red-faced choirboys,
tousle-haired and giggling,
are suddenly serious
for the Amen.
The Vicar sermonizes
on the virtues of discipline
while a girl with plaits
sucks butterscotch
much too loud.
All are gone now
except the organist
who plays a voluntary,
and one small choirboy,
listening solemnly behind a pillar,
who resolves when he grows up
to be a monk.

3. In the Horse and Jockey
the townsfolk are carousing-
a chatter of percentages,
and smutty jokes.
The villagers play darts
and argue times of planting
and the football scores.

At ten all stumble onto silence:
the villagers meandering homeward,
arms entwined, singing
beneath a battered moon;
the townsfolk sliding
to the highway
in their boats of death,
rushing the stars.

TEACHING IN A CITY FAR FROM YOU

At the reception I ask the woman
next to me "What do you teach?"
"How to assess your valuables," she replies.
"I don't have any right now," I say and
think of the unruliness of the pillows
as you rose from them,
the quicksilver of your tongue
surprising me in new places,
your quiet nodding as I argued
in favor of Vermeer
even as the dawn light came in.

You come to the classroom as I
am taking my students around the Metropolitan.
You stare out across the scheming city
which aims always to improve itself;
you sit at a desk and write me a note
as I tell them "Vermeer was, as you see,
preoccupied with the details of domestic life.
Note the precision--
the folds of the linen cloth which appears
almost to be slipping from the table,
the patterning on the milk pitcher
so intricate; and, of course, what he is
most famous for, filtering through
the heavy leaded windows, bringing everything
alive like a character about to step into
the room: the light!"

I'M LEAVING

I've decided there
shall be a new currency
of dead leaves.

I made a purse of bark:
inside, beech leaves
quick as beaten copper,
sycamore
the wrinkled palms
of old fisherwomen.

What shall I buy with my leaves
and who will accept them?
The bookseller refers me to a therapist.
The bartender throws me out.

I will go from here:
a view longing for
white air.

I will donate my savings
to the slant of light--
each leaf a note,
a faded promise.

THE TRAVELER

They have lost me-
Almost. They're still trying
to remember: at a party
They say, 'Was he the one
With arched eyebrows, the eyes
That shone very blue...'

1 moved long since to France
and Germany, past grey rivers
I went by tall grasses
Lost in clouds.

In Prague
A woman told me I was beautiful
And said she couldn't leave
Her husband's house because I
Was an idea she had when
She was very young.

I'm still here as a matter
Of fact--in Meredith, New Hampshire,
Looking out over the lake.
There's a pine tree
I visit often,
Stroke the bark.
If they must know, I still
Gulp my tea too fast and belch
After dinner and get romantic
About geraniums--the red ones
In my window-box
Above the yellow wall.

AT THE FRINGE
(translations).

A WINTER EVENING

When snow falls at the window,
Long tolls the evening bell,
The table is perpared for many,
And the larder is full.

Some, on their wanderings
Drift to the gate down darkened paths.
Golden sprouts the tree of mercy
From the cool snap of earth.

The wanderer steps lightly in:
Grief has turned the sill to stone.
There, pristine and glowing:
Bread and wine upon the table.

--Georg Trakl
(translation with L.D. Davidson).

DIRGE

Sleep and death, those somber demons
Course through my head in the night:
May the icy waves of eternity
Engulf the golden image
Of man. The purple body
Smashes on the treacherous reef
And a dark voice casts
Its lamentations on the sea.
Sister of stormy melancholy,
See how the funeral barge sinks
Under the stars,
The silent face of night.

--Georg Trakl
(translation with L.D. Davidson)

AT THE FRINGE

The corn is cut; the grapes are plucked.
In silence autumn hangs over the village.
Hammer on anvil chiming, chiming.
Laughter like red wine from the gardens.

From the shadows of the trellis
Bring asters for the pale child.
Tell us how long we have been dead;
The sun seeks its blackness.

In the pond the little fish gleam red.
Fearsome the brow knitted in thought;
An evening wind whispers at the windows,
Blue organ tones rising.

The star and its secret glittering
Draw our gaze skyward again.
The mother's ghost in torment trembling;
Black mignonettes in the dark.

--Georg Trakl
(translation with L.D. Davidson)

DECLINE

Above the white pond
Wild birds have taken flight.
At evening an icy wind
blows from our stars.

Above our graves the shattered brow
Of night is bowed; we swing beneath
The oaktree on a silver barge.

The white walls of the city hum.
Under arches of thorn
Oh my brother, we climb blindly
Like the clock's hands
Toward the midnight hour.

--Georg Trakl
(translation with L.D. Davidson)

SLEEP

To hell with your dark poisons,
White sleep!
This sinister garden
Of glimmering trees
heavy with snakes, night moths,
Spiders, bats.
Stranger! your ghost fades
Into the red of sunset,
A gloomy pirate
On the salt-sea of affliction.
White birds flail their wings
At the edge of night
Above the toppling cities
Of steel.

--Georg Trakl
(translation with L.D. Davidson)

GRODEK

At evening autumn woods moan
With deadly weapons, the fading sun
Rolls down behind the golden plains
And blue lakes. Night surrounds
The dying warriors, the ravings and
The lamentations of their shattered mouths.
But still, silent in the vale of willows,
The spilled blood wells, a vengeful god
Dwelling in its red cloud: lunar coolness.
All roads lead to cruel decay.
Beneath the golden bough of night and stars,
Sister's shadow flits through the hushed grove
To greet the ghosts of heroes, the bleeding heads;_
And softly the dark flutes of autumn pipe in the needs.
O prouder grief! Your honoured altars.
Today hot flames of the spirit feed a mighty anguish:
The grandchildren never to be born.

--Georg Trakl
(translation with L.D. Davidson)

THIS YEAR IS LIKE
THE YEAR A THOUSAND YEARS AGO

This year is like the year a thousand years ago.
We carry the pitcher; we prod the backs of our cattle;
We knit and know nothing of winter;
We drink new wine and know nothing...
Soon we will be forgotten
And poems melt like snow by the house.

This year is like the year a thousand years ago.
We peer into the forest as if it were the sty of the world; We tell lies, and weave baskets for apples and pears;
We sleep while our muddied shoes weather on the doorstep.

This year is like the year a thousand years ago.
We know nothing; we know nothing of downfall,
Nothing of sunken cities, nothing of the flood
In which horses and men have drowned.

-- Thomas Bernhard
(translation with L.D. Davidson)

TO SAY A WORD

How difficult it is to say a word
To those who have compromised,
Those unable to distinguish
Between a dream and the solid boughs of the pear tree.

How difficult it is to say a word
On this dusty street
As alien to my shoes
As the sun is to the snow and water is to the desert.

How difficult it is to say a word
To my father and to my mother;
How difficult it is to say a word
To all those who see me
Aging in a wounded autumn.

How difficult it is to say a word
In these days that are so forgettable.
How difficult it is to say a word...

--Thomas Bernhard
(translation with L.D. Davidson)

THAT ANIMAL

That animal was tamed by me.
I extracted it from chaos;
I smeared it
with the pale unction of my kindness.

And then it swallowed me!
What a foul muzzle!
How unworthy its bowels!

You hear me, Jonah?

--Nina Cassian

THE YOUNG BAT

To begin, he circled my neck shyly
and laced it with his singing;
I almost fell in love with his ugly
triangular head, his squinting eyes,
and the sound of his frail bones.

At his first bite
I felt a great relief.
My pulse throbbed eagerly
knowing my blood would flow, diluted,
into another goitre, absolved of sin.

Then I grew weaker.
Clamped to my neck, the vampire
was drinking me, drinking me constantly.
His wings flared wide and free,
his eyes burned like two hieroglyphs--
but I couldn't decipher the message.

--Nina Cassian

THE GREAT SPANGLED FRITILLARY

1. *In the Chrysalis*

I twist in my chrysalis
dreaming of violets--
their scented nurturing,
their heart-shaped leaves
on which I fed as a caterpillar.
I was in love with violets,
I even think in violet light,
but here come the sun's bright
fingers unfastening my bleary-
eyed emergence. I split
the cobweb with my wings
like sails unfurling--
the dawn's breath flutters them
new and wet with secrecy
on the oaktree bough.

2. *First Flight*

I am afraid.
I dip.
I dive.
I am clumsy.
I am a flying laundress
wet sheets for wings--
will they ever dry?
I hate my name--
if only I were Star Spangled,
that at least would be patriotic!
I wish I were Pearly Crescentpot,
Angelic Hairstreak, or Sylvan Angelwing.
Ouch!-- a thistle's thorn!
Oh!-- a cow's nose!
But look!-- I triumph
high above the lake,
my reflection necklace-like
around its throat,
its waters that could drown
a million of me.
I'm grateful I'm not Questionmark,
Lost Metalmark, or Dingy Arctic,
or worst of all the Ruddy Daggerwing!

3. *Under the Full Moon*

It's peaceful here
beneath the stars;
my wings handsome
in moonlight--
orange/purple/lemon--
I think the night becomes me:
skating down the moonbeams
on my brush-feet, I am
night's magician
conjuring the breeze,
the attention of sighs.
From the stars I learn
a faith, a steadfastness.
I'm not lonely--
it's just that I am young
and airborn, passing now
through shadows not menacing
but kind
like well-earned sleep.

4. *March*

It's morning.
I am confident,
sipping nectar
from the Blackeyed Susans,
their tongue-petals
stroking me with sun
in the moist meadows.
I am palpitating,
palpitating,
high above the seething
grasses. I am glad
to be myself:
the Great Spangled Fritillary,
female of the species,
proud and in my prime:
I soar unafraid
knowing my destiny:
In mid-air I'll mate,
a stroking of wings
(a whispering of speckled fans)--
then hide myself in mossy
bark deep in a wood
and later lay my eggs
near violets-- to violets
I'll return. Even now
the safety of their scent
bears me aloft
high in the joyous morning
this spring day!

HOME

The house seems smaller than ever.
I am larger—
like Alice in reverse:
all the ornaments—
the willow-patterned plates,
the Staffordshire vases—
crammed into tiny doll's house
shelves.
I want to get drunk, fly
into a mad dervish
and whirling smash the pots and
trinkets, dirty and rumple all this
neatness and precision, make loud
bellows, the bull in my mother's
china shop and yet her tears
that would follow would destroy me.
The clock's tick punctuates this
silence that I hate
that she has lived in for thirty years.
I remember the old house—
large, airy, opening onto flowers—
where there was room to be wild,
spontaneous, noisy,
but my father was drunk
always, violent,
smashing things.
Though I hated him, I understood.
But this was not my home either.
I am caught
between the masculine expansive
and the feminine containing.
I have the townsman's energy,
the countryman's heart.
For brief moments,
without knowing me really,
you seem to understand
and I think I am at home
at last:
your gentle man's touch,
that safe passion's what I'm after—
the harbor of your arms.

HYPOCHONDRIA

A slight hearing loss
said the doctor; but I will not
leave it at that: I know I have
a tumor of equal size on both ears--
quaint ear muffs of deadness--
striving to connect and do me in.
Already there are spots before my eyes
pulsing like ambulance lights and a
drumroll in my brow--a funereal clanging.
I miss a word: is it doom?
A friend's child says out of the blue
'You have a new future; after death a new
future begins'--he is five and intuitive--
he knows.
Just when everything was rising to perfection--
this calamity: if only I had finished
my life's work--my life! If I had said the word
to change imaginations and help you all...
Oh, I'll come back brandishing my
ear trumpet and you will shout into it your
glib advice: Accept Adjust Reorganize.

THE DEFROCKING OF PASTOR VAN DIEMAN

The deacons have left:
those inquisitive bastards
with their notarized scrolls
and their shrivelled genitals.

I've retired to my loft,
its lattice open. The autumn
night takes deep breaths for me.
God has sent the moon, full even,
as a comfort. He knew
I wasn't meant to be celibate,
how men in the fields would
keep me gazing, how village hands
would distract me in the barn.

The secret's out: now I can pursue
them openly. But I'll keep the private
names I gave them--
Hare, Eagle, Hound and Dove.
Some will stay loyal.
There's one I fancy--Eagle--may choose
to be my fellow public reprobate.

The moon is a white lens. Through it
I see a childhood scene: I'm working
with a chisel on a wooden box-lid,
chipping out a young man
of bold proportions--
a rough angel, clouds for wings..

NIGHT-GARDENING

The garbage man snatches
at chaos, the after-business.
He tries to see a beauty in
all this, caring so much for
ugliness that he's the hider
of it. He wishes he could take
it all, once and for all and
make things orderly. Oh,
he would walk with pride then,
on his lips a righteous smile;
he'd take up night-gardening,
grow moon-white lilies,
trumpeters of cleanliness,
and ivory gardenias,
wafting their scent (his triumph)
into the silent, immaculate streets..

AUGUST

Under the Catalpa Tree, fanning itself
like a jaded peacock, you tell me
a story you have told before:
it concerns an old man of Tuscany who said
he valued love more than his riches.
He gave away his riches to his boy lover
who invested them, doubled them
and left with the money in a boat
with a yellow sail. The sail was so
yellow you say that it blazed like the sun;
like the sun, I repeat, snapping
off grass blades and arranging them
in a circle on my lap. And the old man, you say,
was left to wander distractedly and beg
in the streets. The old man's name was
Alonzo known ever after as The Great Lover
and the boy lover's name was Giorgio
known ever after as The Crafty One and
he married a mulatto dancer in Madrid
and was never heard of again
and I look up at the catalpa tree
which drops a leaf courteously in my lap
in my circle of grass blades and I say
Come to the point: tell me
you're leaving me.

NOTES

1. "Evesham Station 9/9/74": Evesham is a market town in Worcestershire and is pronounced "Eve-shum."

5. "On Listening to Josquin Des Prez": Josquin Des Prez was a French composer of the seventeenth century known for his bawdy secular songs as well as his ethereal liturgical music.

36. "A Day in Carmarthen, 1919": Carmarthen is a market town in Wales close to the English border.

The Miracle

Leaving you
asleep in your room
at the hospice,
I pray for a miracle—
just in case there is a God,
just in case miracles can still happen.
Here's what I pray for:
Not that you won't die
(I know you will, so do you,
the doctors predict it)
but that you'll let yourself fall
asleep in the arms of your God,
and that you'll die serene.

GLC 67
Hewitt

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